

## Orange County Natural Areas Inventory

### BERRYHILL RHODODENDRON BLUFF

Updated 2004

**Site Number:** M07

**Size:** 15 acres

**Site Significance:** Regional

**USGS Quad:** Chapel Hill

**SIGNIFICANT FEATURES:** This site contains a large stand of catawba rhododendron (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) and over two dozen individuals of ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*). The rhododendron is disjunct from the mountains and locally rare in the lower Piedmont; the ginseng is a state-listed species of special concern. This is the only site where either of these species occurs in the Town of Carrboro.

**NATURAL COMMUNITIES:** Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest, Piedmont Heath Bluff, Piedmont Monadnock Forest

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION:** This community of catawba rhododendron (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) and mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) is growing on a steep north-facing slope, which rises 100 feet above Morgan Creek. Among the six isolated rhododendron communities located along Morgan Creek, this is the only one where these two heath species are growing together. On the gentler upper slope and small ravines on the east and west side of this natural area, the mixed mesic hardwood forest provides habitat for a large population of ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*), which is found nowhere else along Morgan Creek. Ginseng is a species that typically grows only in the richest soils; the surprising abundance of spring wildflowers further indicates the soil condition of this site. These species include bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), toothwort (*Cardamine* sp.), trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*), foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*), hepatica (*Hepatica americana*), and windflower (*Thalictrum thalictroides*).

The forest canopy on the mesic upper slopes is composed of numerous individuals up to two feet in diameter. Tree species include beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), red oak (*Quercus rubra*), white oak (*Q. alba*), and tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). Emergent locally above the rhododendron bluff are chestnut oak (*Quercus prinus*), scarlet oak (*Q. coccinea*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), hop hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), and witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*).

Except for the natural area along Bolin Creek (B01), nowhere else in Carrboro is there as much mesic hardwoods as here. It is surrounded by development but is extensive enough so that visitors can feel like they are walking in a large mature forest. This aspect, along with the rhododendron bluff and riparian species growing along the creek, make this the most significant site in Carrboro.

**MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION:** Construction of multifamily housing immediately upslope of the bluff has left very little forest to buffer part of the ginseng population; a trail passes perilously close. Alien invasive plants threaten to replace many native species. The worst culprits are spring silverberry (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) and oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*). Silverberry is becoming common along trails and other disturbances. The bittersweet has totally covered lower portions of the rhododendron ledge